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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the results of a survey on the professional knowledge of and feelings about inclusion of 180 Florida general educators, special educators, administrators, and support personnel. These four groups were asked to respond to the following questions: (1) What is inclusion? (2) How do you feel about inclusion? and (3) how do you think inclusion will affect you? Results of the survey indicate that seasoned educat rs did not differ from beginning teachers in terms of their knowledge about inclusion. Knowledge about inclusion also appeared to be unaffected by grade level. No apparent differences between general and special educators on knowledge level were found. Findings also show that some groups feel more strongly about inclusion than others, although years of experience and grade level placement did not have a significant effect on feelings. Finally, responses to the third question, how inclusion affects the respondents, varied widely. The majority of responses were focused on pragmatic issues. General educators were concerned with limited planning time and preparation for teaching students with special needs in general classroom settings. Special educators reported fears of job loss and changing responsibilities. (CR)

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Introduction

The Regular Education Initiative (REI) was first proposed by Madeline Will, the former Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, in the mid 1980s. The REI is a service delivery model combining special education expertise and general education expertise. REI intended to prevent student failure, instead of identifying failure. Inclusion is a component of REI. Inclusion refers to the successful participation of students having special needs within the continuum of regular education programs and the community. Inclusion means modifying traditional teaching methods, curriculum, and visions so that a broader spectrum of services and techniques is available to all students. Inclusion celebrates and accommodates diversity by pooling resources and sharing responsibilities. By bringing together general and special education teachers, learners would receive the best of both worlds and the number of children with disabilities educated in segregated programs would be greatly reduced.

Inclusion has taken on a variety of meanings and perceptions. Educators disagree about the nature of inclusion. Some proponents of inclusion promote "full inclusion" for all students and desire to eliminate the continuum of services currently available. Others advocate inclusion as part of a continuum of services designed for individual students. Feelings about inclusion vary greatly and opinions expressed about inclusion range from the excitement of teaming to deliver services to worries about job loss and increased responsibilities without proper compensation or training. For some educators, inclusion is the only way to teach. For others, it is one of the ways to serve learners. The only aspect of inclusion agreed upon by most professionals is the need for educating people about inclusion and the need for further research in this area.

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Method

The Florida Inclusion Network sought to determine professional knowledge of and feelings about inclusion. A total of 180 general educators, special educators, administrators, and support personnel in the northeastern area of Florida were surveyed. These four groups were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. "What is inclusion?"
2. "How do you feel about inclusion?"
3. "How do you think inclusion will affect you?"

A total of 260 surveys were sent out, with 70% returned for analysis. Respondents were classified in terms of the position held (e.g., general educator), years of experience (e.g., 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 10-20 years, and over 20 years), and grade level placement (e.g., Pre K-6th grade, middle school, or high school). Answers for the first question were coded into one of three categories: (a) knowledgeable, (b) somewhat knowledgeable, or (c) least knowledgeable. Answers for question two were coded into one of three categories: (a) feelings expressed positively, (b) feelings expressed positively but with reservations, or (c) feelings expressed negatively. Analysis of the answers to question three were categorized by content. Consequently, survey results were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

Due to the categorical nature of the data, nonparametric measures were used for analyses. Alpha was preset at .01. Researchers chose to be conservative due to the large sample size. A chi square procedure, used to detect differences in terms of knowledge about inclusion, showed that not all respondent groups are equally knowledgeable about inclusion, $c2$ (6, $N = 180$) = 19.63, $p < .01$. Figure 1 shows knowledge level across groups. Seasoned educators, however, did not differ from beginning teachers in terms of their knowledge about inclusion. Knowledge about inclusion also appears to be unaffected by grade level. When analyzing knowledgeable responses of general and special educators, no apparent difference between the two exists. When analyzing the least knowledgeable responses, however, the two groups do not respond similarly. When comparing knowledgeable versus least knowledgeable responses for special and general educators, a phi coefficient of .412 demonstrates a significant degree of association between group membership and level of knowledge. A particular degree of knowledge about inclusion is clearly associated with whether respondents are general or special educators.

An overall chi square analysis of feelings about inclusion shows that groups differ on this dimension, $c2$ (6, $N = 176$) = 20.7854, $p < .01$. Some groups feel more strongly about inclusion than others, as depicted in Figure 2. Again, years of experience and grade level placement do not have a significant impact on feelings. A chi square, based on negative feelings alone about inclusion, shows there are

negative feelings alone about inclusion, shows there are differences among the groups, $c2 (3, N = 64) = 42.88$, $p < .01$. The number of negative responses is proportionally higher in at least one group. A phi coefficient of .34 demonstrates a significant association between group membership and negative responses.

Responses to the third question, how inclusion affects the respondents, varied widely. The majority of responses were focused on pragmatic issues. General educators were concerned with limited planning time and preparation for teaching students with special needs within a general classroom setting. Comments include:

- I feel I would be burdened more than I already am in planning and carrying out activities for all children of all abilities. I feel I would need to return to school to learn how to deal with many more child-related problems that are prevalent in society today.
- Inclusion makes it harder for me to assist and help all of my students when the disabled/disadvantaged student demands more of me and takes time away from other children who also need me.

Special educators reported fears of job loss and changing responsibilities. Example responses include, "If implemented, I would become either a teacher on a rolling cart or a highly educated teacher's aide," and "Inclusion will eliminate jobs." Administrators' comments focused on accessing appropriate resources to implement inclusion, providing adequate training for teachers, and "selling" the idea to parents. On the positive side, teachers responded favorably to a team approach to education, and to the opportunity to learn from each other. Example comments from general and special educators, respectively, are:

- If there are students having difficulty with a concept then one of us can take these students and work with them.
- Inclusion would allow team teaching and having an opportunity to work in the classroom with a peer would allow me to learn more and improve techniques.

Implications

Teacher education is needed if inclusion is to remain a system of delivery for special needs students. Because groups of educators differ in their knowledge about inclusion, instruction must be provided, so that a common understanding of inclusion can be established.

Groups differ in terms of their feelings about inclusion. Negative feelings, in particular, are expressed disproportionately across groups of educators. Reasons for negative feelings about inclusion, however, need to be understood for general and special educators alike. Do

negative feelings arise from limited inclusion knowledge or experience with an unsupported inclusive model? The answer is unclear. Further research into inclusion is warranted.

The personal perceptions of the effects of inclusion vary. Concerns expressed by educators reveal the need for implementing appropriate models of inclusion, if inclusion is to survive into the twenty-first century. The concerns expressed by sampled educators, such as impact on planning time, job security, and changing responsibilities, must not be overlooked. Inclusion is not the only answer to problems encountered within a dual system of education. It is, however, a delivery system that must be carefully considered in the education of students with disabilities.

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